

Editor's note: We would like to share a series of reports in the next few Newsletters highlighting various areas of work from goals for the new English Bible School to why we have added an outpatient medical center. And to begin the series we will start with some of the background about our three missionary families.

We stand in awe as we see how God has in times past led and directed good men and women into His fields which are "white unto harvest." He continues to lead today. Ben, Becca, Ryan, Justine and Eric are truly a godsend. Sidney

The Faces of Namikango

by Shawn Tyler, Namikango Board Member

Ben and Becca Hayes

Ben and Becca met in high school where both shared an interest in missions. Ben enrolled at Lubbock Christian University and majored in Engineering with a Minor in Missions. He transferred to Texas Tech and completed his degree work in December of 2008.

Becca pursued her passion for missions by moving to Mbale, Uganda, in August 2005 and served as a teacher for the mission school. Becca served until December 2006 working in Kitale, Kenya and Nimule, Sudan.

Their paths crossed again in the spring of 2007 at a mutual friend's wedding. Their interest grew and dating turned into an engagement and a wedding in November of 2008 – shortly before Ben completed his Engineering degree.

Ben and Becca were both extremely interested in missions but were advised to work a while before pursuing missions - which they did. Ben worked as a design engineer at Cameron Corp. in Houston for three years. As a consolation for putting their mission dream on hold, Ben and Becca took a month-long trip visiting Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya.

In 2011, Ben received a phone call from his dad Kirk Hayes informing him that Mark Thiesen and his family were leaving Namikango Mission in Malawi and returning home and asked Ben if he and Becca were interested in filling the position at Namikango. Ben and Becca met with B Shelburne, and Sidney Vaughn. Perhaps one of the most important observations made by Ben and Becca was that God never closed the door to Namikango even though he was in a 3-year commitment to Cameron Corp. The opportunity to go, their funding, and even family counsel was all positive. After prayerful consideration, they decided to go and moved to Malawi in July 2012.

Ryan and Justine Hayes

Ryan and Justine have vastly different backgrounds: Ryan was raised in Kenya (by missionary parents) and Justine was raised in America.

Ryan graduated from Texas Tech intending to pursue his passion for finance. One class revealed to him the power of microfinance to the poorest people who are excluded from bank loans, due to a lack of



After their flight to Malawi, they were being driven to the Mission and their driver hit a person on the road just miles from the Mission house. Several intense hours followed before Becca, four months pregnant at the time, could finally get home. Welcome to Namikango!

Seven years into mission work, Ben and Becca are at home. It looks like they belong in Malawi. With verandah doors open and kids playing in a beautiful yard, we talked easily about their duties. Ben wears the title of Director at the Namikango Mission. That means he handles general oversight of all the ministries and personnel of the Mission. Ben shared a list of responsibilities that included: administration, HR, accounting, recruiting, interviews, personnel problems, land management, village visit program, church seminars, Bible school program, health committee, curriculum development, discipleship groups, newsletter and monthly reports, not to mention the non-government organization partnerships. Duties are heavy, the work is large, and thousands of Malawians are affected by Ben's decisions. It is a prayer-full responsibility. They acknowledged that he doesn't do it alone as Eric, Ryan and his family, and the Malawian staff all share a large part of the load.

Becca has been busy as well. The Hayeses have been blessed with three children - Braylon (8), Brooklyn (6), and Britain (4). Becca finds herself a full-time wife and mother as well as a home-school teacher for multiple grades. Becca occasionally speaks in village meetings, helps lead Bible Study in Zomba, organizes and hosts ex-pat community events, and participates in team meetings.

Ben and Becca have grown into their respective roles wonderfully. They are a godsend! They exude spiritual maturity, wisdom, and a long-suffering patience needed for serving cross-culturally on the mission field. They continue a long line of strong missionary families who have served at Namikango Mission.

assets. Ryan, a guy who digs deep to learn all he can and to gather more experience, agreed to spend a term of service helping a microfinance program targeting the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, working with Mission of Hope.

Justine, with a passion for mission outreach, never expected to become a missionary. She did go to Kenya for a term of service with

Mission of Hope. Justine, already in Nairobi, was assigned to help Ryan get settled in for his work. They got to know each other through emails back and forth before Ryan's arrival. They found their friendship easy and enjoyable. Both saw substance and a deep faith in the other. They had meetings for coffee and discussions of the future. These turned into a Valentine's Day proposal. They were married in April of 2012 and remained at Mission of Hope for another 18 months.

Ryan talked often with his brother Ben and Becca in Malawi. The conversation turned to the idea of Ryan and Justine joining them in Malawi, with the goal of Ryan starting a Village Savings and Loan (VSL) program among the churches and communities around Namikango Mission. They prayed about the Namikango invitation, and in 2013 decided to move to Malawi.

In just three and a half years, Ryan reports they have formed and are working with 125 small VSL groups, which include more than 2,400 Malawians, 78% of which are women. These groups have raised about \$86,000 among themselves without additional help from the Mission or outside resources. These funds are used to provide small loans to members to address personal or family needs, farming, starting or expanding small businesses, and generally provide greater financial stability to people living at and below the poverty level – people who would not be able to get help from a major bank.

I had the privilege of attending a VSL meeting where they sang songs, read Scripture, and then worked through a series of steps in the VSL program, i.e. *paying back debts, buying shares, etc.* A



Eric Gephart

When you meet Eric, he shows a winsome smile, obviously intelligent, and has an easy sense of humor that makes you feel at ease around him.

His journey to Namikango Mission started in a distant state, far from the historical roots of the founding Texas churches.

Eric was born and raised in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. He grew up in a Christian home with his dad serving as an Elder. When asked when he started thinking about missions, Eric said, 'as far back as I could remember, I wanted to be a missionary.'

Eric sought a Bible degree and majored in Christian Ministry, completing his Bachelor's degree at Messiah College in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 2009. He then enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at Emmanuel Christian Seminary in Tennessee. Eric worked his way through grad school, graduating debt-free in 2013.

During his grad school work, Eric did an internship in Nairobi, Kenya, and ended up sharing a tiny two room apartment with a young man named Ryan Hayes. Ryan had arrived the week before. Both of them worked in a microfinance program to help poverty-stricken families build resources for small businesses. Eric and Ryan became close friends and it was that friendship that eventually drew Eric to Namikango. Eric received an invitation to come and help build an English Bible School Program for Namikango. This fit well with his passion, so by June 2015, Eric agreed to move to Malawi.

Eric spent all of 2016 in the United States raising funds so he could move from Kenya to Malawi. In 2017 he arrived in Zomba ready to get started.

local leader ran the meeting with Namikango staff monitoring. It was obvious Ryan and his assistant Tankhani have done a great job training and establishing a workable financial model.

Justine has been extremely busy herself. She has taken her many talents, organizational skills, and drive, and folded them into raising a family. Ryan and Justine have three beautiful girls, Amelie (5), Lily (3), and Rylee (1½). Besides being a wife and mother to three, Justine home-schools her daughters and still finds time to actively engage in Namikango ministry and team matters. (*I looked but didn't see a superhero cape poking out from beneath her normal attire.*)

Ryan and Justine have adapted easily to life in Malawi. They are relaxed, engaged, knowledgeable, and effective. They plan to continue serving at Namikango Mission for the near future. Personally, I am glad of that and am sure there's a growing number of Malawians who are too.

There he had the task of creating an English Curriculum for the Namikango Bible School – a daunting task. Eric found a solid program of Bible training already functioning on the village level. Curriculum for 20 courses had been developed and updated over the years, serving 25 Village Bible Schools in Malawi and two in Mozambique. The plan was to develop a higher-standard English program that could possibly be submitted for accreditation with the National Council of Higher Education in Malawi. Research into that possibility is ongoing.

While the new starting date for the English program has been pushed back, Eric has made significant progress in curriculum development. He currently serves as head of all Bible programs with the able assistance of Mission Staff leaders. The new English program will emphasize practical discipleship, personal spiritual growth, community impact, and a little agricultural training to supplement the traditional text-based curriculum as well as lots of Bible courses.

One additional note is that Eric has helped restart the "*Liu la Namikango*" - a news and teaching bulletin that had lapsed for several years. They currently print 5,000 copies for distribution through camp meetings, church visits, Community Health Evangelism (CHE) and Village Savings and Loan (VSL) programs. This is the revival of a long-standing tradition of printing materials produced by Namikango.

Eric is happy to be at Namikango. He has a tremendous appreciation for the strong tradition of Namikango Mission and he strives to build upon the foundation laid by numerous missionary families from years past and present.



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Roof's Going On! by Ben Hayes

New roofs are going up everywhere! The roofs for the admin building, the coffee processing facility, and the Ntonda classroom are completed. Some finishing work on the interiors remain before they are ready to be used. The admin building, being larger, has a fair amount of work before it is completed.

Ntonda School is now closed for the semester. The last term was completed in July, so when school starts again in September, the plan will be for students to be in the new

building. Everyone is looking forward to being out from under the trees and into a nice, new building.





Old Bluegum Trees

These two ancient **bluegum/eucalyptus** trees have been on this campus since anyone here can remember. Symon Katete, one of our senior staff members, remembers them being here when he was a kid on this campus in the 1960's. It was a sad day when they had to be cut down. The trees had died and posed a threat of falling and crushing nearby buildings. After cutting them down, the wood from them will supply material for construction or firewood for months to come.

They are still of use even after being cut down. There's something sobering about seeing something come down that has been here that long. When we cut it, one of our staff, Andrew, said, "Well, we should remove the stump and plant another tree in its place, so that in the future, others will enjoy it again." This reminded me of Abraham and the Tamarisk tree he planted in Gen. 21. A Tamarisk is a salt-cedar tree and doesn't grow fast. He had a vision of those who came after him enjoying its shade. It's hard to think of doing something that may not benefit you, but will benefit future generations. This takes patience. And it's special how something as seemingly small as cutting down a tree can prompt a simple, but wise response, like what Andrew said. What kinds of Tamarisk trees am I going to plant today in life that my children and co-workers, that will benefit future generations? What Tamarisks tree are you planting today? Blessings, **Ben**

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